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Academical Dress at the University of Sheffield: A Timeline

by Nicholas Gledhill

To meet the growing local demand for higher education in the second half of the nineteenth century a group of university colleges was formed, one of which was Firth College in Sheffield. In the 1870s the Cambridge University Extension Movement was helping those who could not attend Oxbridge for circumstantial reasons. This movement's lectures began in Sheffield in 1875, and their success inspired the mayor (Mark Firth) to found a college in which university courses could be conducted on a permanent basis. Some students attained graduate status, but since university colleges were not empowered to confer their own degrees such students took the External London University degrees.

Thirty years later, however, Sheffield University was created by Royal Charter, which provided; 'There shall be and there is hereby constituted and founded in Our said City of Sheffield a University by the name and style of "The University of Sheffield".' That was on 31 May 1905, and by October the first academic session was under way with 114 full time students reading for degrees in Arts, Science, Medicine.

The timeline given below is primarily concerned with tracing the official regulation of Academic Dress of the University of Sheffield since its foundation. However, various secondary sources have been used to interpret the regulations and place them in context. Although the regulations are now without anomaly this was not always so, and tracking down the specifics of when changes were made would not have been possible without access to the complete set of the *Calendars of the University of Sheffield*. Some enigmas remain. Why green for bachelors and masters? Why red and not scarlet, for doctors' hoods?

A Timeline of the Academic Dress of the University

1908–09

The Regulations provide for undergraduates and graduates to have academic dress, the particulars of the former not being specified. Bachelors are to have Oxford BA [b1] gowns, masters to have Oxford MA [m1] and doctors to have Oxford doctors' robes with bell-shaped sleeves in black cloth [d2]. Hoods for all graduates are to be of the Cambridge shape [f1]. Bachelors have a fine green cloth shell, the cowl lined with fur and the cape bound with two inches of silk of the colour distinctive of the degree. Masters have a hood of green silk, lined throughout with the degree silk, while doctors have a red hood shell and are lined as the masters'. The degree colours are to be: Arts—crushed strawberry; Pure Science—apricot; Medicine—red; Surgery—red edged with white; Engineering—

purple; and Metallurgy—steel-grey. Academic caps are to be black and of the ordinary academic shape, but doctors' caps are to be covered in velvet rather than the fine cloth of other graduates.

1909–10

The Master of Surgery alone is to be red edged white for hood lining purposes. The Bachelor of Surgery, MB and MD have red as the degree colour. (Presumably the previous *Calendar* that stated the BCh and MCh both had the red and white colour was wrong).

1911–12

Law is introduced with a distinctive border and lining silk of pale green.

1912–13

Associates in Applied Science (Engineering having purple trim and Metallurgy having steel-grey) are entitled to wear gown and cap only [b4] with coloured button and cord on the sleeve gathering.

The regulations note that Ede & Ravenscroft are Robemakers to the University.

1917–18

Similar to the sub-degree gowns just introduced is that of the Art Master's Diploma, but with crushed strawberry trim. This gown also has a similarly coloured cord 'on the outside edge of the revers down the front of the gown'.

1921–22

The PhD hood lining of dark green is introduced.

1926–27

Dentistry is introduced with the silk colour of pale rose pink. BDS and MDS degrees have predictable hoods, and the LDS has the sub-degree gown following earlier examples of such gowns.

1931–32

Women, both undergraduates and graduates, start to use the Oxford ladies' soft cap. Graduates from earlier than 1930 can wear either this or a mortarboard.

1933–34

The doctors' undress and full-dress robes are distinguished from one another; the Oxford bell-shape sleeved robe for the scarlet, and the Oxford gimp lay gown for the undress, with the pentagons on the sleeves and skirt modified to have concave sides.

Music degree hoods begin to have a distinctive white watered-silk border at this time, the degrees having been introduced a year earlier.

1946–47

Graduands are advised that the Marshal may exclude persons in the degree ceremony if they are not dressed in clothes of ‘subdued colour or Naval, Military or Air Force Uniform’.

1955–56

Music degree hoods are conformed to the same style as other hoods, cream brocade being used to border the Bachelors’ hoods and line those of Doctors.

The anomalous MCh hood is conformed to the rest of the masters’ hoods and was lined in red only henceforth.

Another subject is accorded a sub-degree gown similar to the others mentioned above: Architecture has old gold as sleeve trim.

1960–61

Lemon yellow is introduced as the silk for the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies.

1963–64

The higher doctors begin to use the Cambridge festal robes while the PhD retain the Oxford doctors’ robe.

Jurisprudence is allocated olive green as its distinctive subject silk.

The Science in Technology degrees depart from the Engineering colour of purple and begin to have lilac.

1967–68

Cerise is introduced as the Medical Science degree colour; and pearl as the Education colour.

1972–73

The MA in Law is to use olive-green lining.

1973–74

The BA(Law) is brought in with olive green as silk border.

1977–78

The MPhil begins to be awarded, with the predictable dark green lining in a green silk hood shell.

1980–81

The MMus is introduced with cream brocade as lining.

1992–93

The joint degree with Sheffield Hallam appears: the hood [f1] has a gold shell, lined and edged dark blue.

1993–94

Gowns for undergraduate certificate and diploma holders come into the scheme. Facings and yoke are in the distinctive faculty colours.

Postgraduate diplomate hoods are entered in the *Calendar* for the first time, being an appropriate blend of bachelors' and masters' hoods: unlined silk with the subject colour bordering the cape and neckband.

A distinctive colour for Board of Collegiate Studies (dealing with associated FE college awards) is introduced. That colour is Saxon (deep) blue.

Women's headwear returns to the pre-1930 arrangement: all members of the University are to use the mortarboard.

1994–95

Professional doctorates begin to develop, taking the PhD robe but with hoods lined according to subject. The first is Doctor of Clinical Psychology. (Incidentally, the regulation on hood linings for newer degrees has considerable potential for confusion. DCLinPsy is awarded jointly in the Faculties of Pure Science and Social Sciences.¹ Since the regulation for hood lining simply states that degrees in Faculty X are such a colour and degrees in Faculty Y are another colour, it becomes difficult if not impossible to discern from the regulation if this particular doctorate has an apricot or lemon-yellow lining.)

1996–97

The Doctor of Education degree is approved.

1999–2000

The Doctor of Business Administration degree is approved.

The Regulations note:

A graduate in any Faculty may wear the academic costume prescribed for his or her degree or other qualification in the Regulations in force at the time of the date of conferment of the Degree or award of the qualification.

2001–02

The higher doctorates are itemized as: LittD, DSc, LLD, MD, DEng, DMet, DSc(Tech), and DMus. The PhD robe is also worn by the following mushrooming set of professional doctorates: DBA, DCLinPsy, EdD, DDSc, DMedSci, and DMin. The hood lining of these professional doctorates, however, reflects the subjects of study and not the dark green of Philosophy.

¹ Sheffield University Calendar 1994-95 p. A79.